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ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK





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ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

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OTTAWA



LOOKING ACROSS AZTOTH LAKE TO SANDY BEACH
ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

WITHIN an hour's motor ride from Edmonton, Alberta, lies Canada's second largest animal reserve, Elk Island National Park. The reserve, the first animal sanctuary to be established by the Government has been in existence since 1906 and was originally created for the preservation of elk or wapiti. This noble animal once found in numbers on the prairies was then fast disappearing before the oncoming tide of settlement and the increasing inroads of hunters. In 1903 it was brought to the attention of the Government that a herd of these animals numbering about seventy-five head, was then roaming among the Beaver Hills to the east of Edmonton. Game authorities reported that this was probably the last large wild herd in existence in this part of Canada. Accordingly, several lovers of wild life, including the Hon. Frank Oliver, then member for Edmonton in the Federal House,

strongly advised the Government that it would be a commendable action to fence in an enclosure in this district and thus create a sanctuary which would serve to protect this interesting native species as well as moose and Black-tailed deer which were also known to be making their home in the same region. The suggestion received the sympathetic consideration of the Hon. Clifford Sifton, then Minister of the Interior, and steps were at once taken towards acquiring the land. The first area,



MOOSE
Elk Island National Park



ASTOTIN LAKE - MAINLAND
Elk Island National Park

successfully transferred to the park, and in October of the same year a second train load of 211 animals was also sent north to the reserve, or a total of 410 in all. These buffalo remained at Elk Island Park until June, 1909. By this time the fence at the new Buffalo Park, Wainwright, had been completed and this park was ready for the herd. Owing to natural decreases and losses due to the change of environment the number in Elk Island Park at that time was about 370. Of these, 325 were transferred to the Wainwright Park and the remaining 45 were left in Elk Island to form the nucleus of an additional herd there. In the twenty succeeding years,

covering sixteen square miles in township 54, ranges 19 and 20, and which had originally formed part of the Cooking Lake Forest Reserve, was set aside by the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act of 1906, and fenced during the same year. The animals enclosed numbered about thirty head of fine elk, an equal number of Black-tailed deer, and a few moose.

When, in 1907, the Dominion Government purchased the Pablo herd of buffalo numbering 716 animals, Elk Island Park was utilized as a home for the first shipments of these animals until the Buffalo Reserve at Wainwright was made ready for their reception. In June the first train load of 199 buffalo arrived at Lamont and were suc-

under careful supervision, these buffalo steadily increased and today the park possesses a herd almost as large as that originally purchased from Michael Pablo. The total number of animals now in Elk Island Park (March 31, 1929) are: buffalo 593, moose 400, elk 450 and deer 200.

To the people of Canada a sentimental interest must always attach to the American bison. Up to half a century ago it was the outstanding big game animal of the Dominion and there are men still living who saw in boyhood, herds numbering tens of thousands roaming the western plains. In the development of Western Canada it played a part which can never be ignored. Without this source of natural food the opening up of the West must have been rendered infinitely more difficult. To the early settlers and explorers the buffalo spelt food, clothing and shelter. Its meat was as well flavoured and as nutritious as the finest of beef; its thick robe furnished covering and clothing against the winter cold; its hide was used for tepees and boats while its horns, hair, hoofs and bones furnished many articles of use and adornment. The success which has attended the Government's efforts for the restoration and conservation of the species appears now to ensure the continuance of the buffalo and it seems likely that it will remain to provide a source of increasing interest to all lovers of wild life.

In 1922, owing to the rapidly increasing numbers of the herds, the area of Elk Island Park was extended by the addition of thirty-six square miles of territory, lying immediately south of the original reserve. The land, which had previously formed

part of the Cooking Lake Forest Reserve, was admirably suited to the purposes of the park, since it consisted principally of open pasture lands unfitted for agricultural settlement, but well watered with small lakes and possessing good hay meadows capable of supplying feed for the animals in the winter season.

The buffalo at Elk Island Park are fine specimens of their kind. The pelage is particularly dark



BUFFALO
Elk Island National Park

and thick and the animals are all sturdy and well developed. Although they are much less wild than when originally captured it is inadvisable for visitors to go near them on foot, though they may be approached with safety in an automobile. Both the moose and elk are also finely developed specimens of their kind.

Elk Island Park has become a sanctuary for many kinds of water-fowl and upland game birds as it provides in abundance



HERD OF ELK—Elk Island National Park

excellent shelter and natural breeding grounds. Wild duck and geese have also apparently discovered that within this area they will be safe from molestation and they rest here in thousands on their way to the northern breeding grounds while many remain to nest by the shores of the numerous lakes. Blue herons are also found in large numbers, particularly on Crane Island in Astotin lake, where approximately three score pair were noted last season. The park also affords excellent protection and breeding areas for Sharp-tailed and Ruffed grouse and both these species are now abundant.

APPROACHES TO THE PARK

The southern gateway to the park lies about twenty-nine miles east of Edmonton and is reached by the Yellow Trail Motor highway. For through travellers by rail the nearest railroad point is Ardrossan, a small station on the main line of the Canadian National railways, seventeen miles east of Edmonton. From Ardrossan a road leads north for about a mile and a half to join a through motor highway known as the Yellow Trail. The distance from Ardrossan to the southern gateway is approximately nine miles. Motorists from the east may approach the park via Vegreville by way of the Yellow trail. The distance from Vegreville to the park gate is about



HERD OF BUFFALO—Elk Island National Park

thirty-five miles. On the north the Winnipeg-Saskatoon-Edmonton branch of the Canadian National railways passes within a few miles of the park and visitors may alight at Lamont which is a little over five miles distant from the northeast corner of the park.

Elk Island Park is entirely surrounded by thirty-four miles of nine-strand, buffalo-proof wire fence. Fire-guards, sixteen feet in width, are ploughed about the park, both immediately inside and outside the fence.

The chief lakes in the southern part of the park are Tawayak lake and Little Tawayak lake. North of Tawayak lake lie Oster lake, Paul lake and Long lake. The finest lake in the park is the Asotin lake situated near the park's headquarters. This is a beautiful body of water approximately

two and a half by one and a half miles and containing twenty-one islands, of which Long island is the largest. South of Long island and near the southern shore of the lake is Elk island to which the park owes its name. East of Long island is Crane island, noted for its rookery of Blue herons. At the headquarters of the park will be found the superintendent's office and residence where full information may be obtained about the herds of animals and the various points of interest in the park.

From headquarters a good road leads south and east about Astoria lake to "Sandy Beach", a natural bathing beach of fine white sand on the opposite side of the lake. Here bath-houses will be found for the convenience of visitors. The distance across the lake as the crow flies is about one and a half miles, by road about five miles.

CAMPING

Permits may be obtained from the superintendent for the privilege of erecting tents at designated points within the park. The charge is one dollar per tent. Boats for use on the lake may be hired from private parties. There is no fee for the use of bath-houses.

